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UNCLAS WELLINGTON 000322

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/PD-AGRIMES, EAP/ANP-DRICCI, EAP/P-KBAILES, INR/R/MR

E.O. 12985: N/A

TAGS: [OTRA](#) [KIRC](#) [OIIP](#) [MNUC](#) [KPAO](#) [KMDR](#) [OPRC](#) [NZ](#)

SUBJECT: OUTDATED ATTITUDES FRUSTRATE PUBLIC DIPLOMACY EFFORTS IN NEW ZEALAND

SUMMARY: Negative perceptions of the United States, sparked by the US response to New Zealand's anti-nuclear legislation, are becoming an entrenched filter through which New Zealanders view all US foreign policy initiatives. Decades later, these lingering sentiments are exploited by anti-American proponents to generate suspicion, and they undermine any attempt to portray US foreign policy as pragmatic, multi-lateral, flexible, and forward-looking. END SUMMARY.

1. New Zealand media reflect the views of the wider New Zealand population when they describe the US reaction to the anti-nuclear legislation as "heavy-handed" and "bullying." New Zealanders feel that the US reaction failed to recognize New Zealand's sovereignty and its right to make its own choices and disagree with the US. One major daily does not hesitate to describe the residual ill-feeling as "anti-Americanism"; the country's second-largest daily, the Wellington-based Dominion Post outlines the phenomenon like this:

BEGIN TEXT: The nuclear impasse is a highly visible irritant and has contributed to a regrettable undertone of anti-American sentiment... What is needed is for disagreements to be managed more maturely. That they are not is partly New Zealand's fault ... but the U.S. also contributed to the suspicion and ill-feeling. Its heavy-handed response helped turn the anti-nuclear legislation into an icon that not only expresses New Zealand's long-standing suspicion of all things nuclear, but also symbolizes New Zealand's right to determine its own foreign policy. If the U.S. wants to repair the relationship, it is going to have to do more than pay lip service to New Zealand's right to disagree. Restricting military cooperation harms only the common interests of the two countries, particularly when U.S. and New Zealand personnel find themselves working alongside each other. END TEXT. (07/06/05)

A prominent South Island daily, The Otago Daily Times, adds:

BEGIN TEXT: The folk-memory of events such as America's bullying response ... has ensured popular support for the legislation, today almost an act of blind faith... No change will occur, however, while New Zealanders continue with the belief that to do so would make them feel like citizens of a client state. America's failure to recognize this widely-held belief is the chief reason for the enduring ... sentiment. END TEXT. (07/10/05)

2. As long as New Zealanders continue to view US policy through this filter of residual ill-feeling, they are likely to construe any US action in a way that bolsters their established negative view of the United States. This results in these harmful perceptions becoming further ingrained.

In February The Dominion Post expressed concern that anti-Americanism predicated on perceived US "bullying" and "heavy-handed response" was and is becoming entrenched, particularly in the younger generation.

BEGIN TEXT: The US insistence on punishing New Zealand for banning nuclear warships is petty and unproductive... A generation of New Zealanders has now been brought up with the knowledge that whatever former Secretary of State Colin Powell might have said, the US and New Zealand are not "very, very, very good friends." Good friends do not try to resolve disagreements over matters of principle by bullying those they disagree with. As a sovereign nation, New Zealand is entitled to determine its own foreign policy. US attempts to force a change of heart by linking anti-nuclear policy to trade and military cooperation do nothing for its standing in this part of the world. END TEXT. (02/27/06)

3. Two decades of conscientious conventional public diplomacy have yielded limited results. Making further, significant progress and preventing US policy from consistently being used to undermine US interests requires creative, modern, big-picture strategies focused on countering this underlying perception.

New Zealand's largest circulation daily, The New Zealand Herald, clearly articulates the hope that a new American strategy might provide the impetus required to win the hearts and minds of New Zealanders and cement closer relations between the two countries. It expresses a desire for Washington to "help New Zealanders recognize a misplaced and redundant source of pride." (07/06/05)

4. While Embassy Wellington has undertaken some unconventional public diplomacy (including a proposal for a New Zealand-run museum exhibition examining the context of decisions about the bilateral relationship, school debates with moots such as "NZ contributes more

to the US than the US contributes to NZ," and our regular but unconventionally-structured dialogues with the media), we are exploring further possibilities and look forward to an exchange of views with Washington as we move forward.

BURNETT, ACTING